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At Brunning: People and Technology

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At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

The Last of the Blackberry

"History, like love, is so apt to surround her heroes with an atmosphere of imaginary brightness." — **James Fennimore Cooper**, the Last of the Mohicans

Many people like their Blackberry phones. Crackberry addiction is hard to overcome. If you've ever typed on a Blackberry keyboard, the ones with real keys and an extremely smart and learning spell checker, well, a virtual one will never feel right. Kinetic memory fades slowly like riding a bike.

The lesson of Blackberry is that technology and love and lust of technology do not endure. Our own behavior should confirm this. Right now we flit from one instance of an iPhone to the next. Momentarily we may be excited by the new car feel of version six and we have that fleeting sense we are ahead of the curve. Yet suddenly, the curve is in our rear window.

The new Blackberry smartphones can do everything an iPhone or Android phone can. They have the touch screen and cover the important apps found in any other operating system. And one model has the real keyboard.

In my office drawer I have my collection of Blackberries. There is the huge 7250 that resembled a Star Trek communicator. The first people around our university to have these were male administrators. They loved this technology that gave them a phone and email in stride. At times they may want to have beamed themselves out of meetings, elsewhere. Why else wear it on a holster like Captain Kirk?

Next in line was one of the "Sure-Type" 7100 series with dual character keys for rapid typing. You navigated the color desktop-like screen with icons with three movement keys. The Pearl or 8100 series simplified screen movement with a small rolling and clickable ball. The "pearl" bought a mouse role to the nontouch screen that simplified moving around and clicking on application icons.

Now this was an elegant and neat phone. Light, compact, it was a flip phone without the flip. It fits now as it did then secure and precise in my palm. True the screen was tiny, too small for the photos and movies we might want to watch, but who wouldn't want to slip your phone into a front pocket or hidden purse sleeve? Simply smooth...

My last and best Blackberry, the Curve (8330 series), included the pearl — now black — and enlarged and widened the earlier Pearl series to provide more screen and better web features. Throughout the decade RIM aka Blackberry reduced its size while reaching out to "do everything" the computing world of smartphones were heading to.

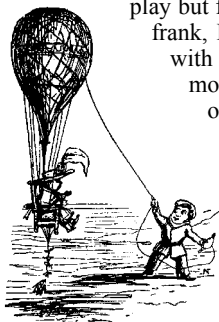
We've known for some time this didn't work and Blackberry has spent the last five years in decline. They changed their name, they developed new operating system, they've innovated a surprisingly smart and versatile tethered tablet. And just as the market was telling Blackberry to quit — they released two new handsets, the Q10 for real keyboard lovers and the Z10.

If everyone had a free day with these new Blackberries, other factors (data plans, providers, discounts aside) it's a good bet Blackberry would be less in the dumpster than it is. Both are great telephones for talking and each keeps Blackberry's expertise at enterprise secure email (and increasingly Web data, social media security) with smartphones that swipe and type with ease.

Blackberry's history is likely that of any in information technology. It's entwined with success, fear of ruining a good thing with change, and the inevitable end of a good thing. The amazing thing it still is good but our minds are elsewhere.

Disclosure. I own an iPhone 5, iPad 3rd Generation, and an old 4GB Nano iPod. I would like a larger Mac Pro with a big display but frankly I can't afford it. Equally frank, I would really know what to do with it after many years plunking and mousing on Windows. My iTunes on the Windows computer doesn't really work and, although I like iCloud, it zaps battery life from all my iProducts connected to the cloud. So most of the time my devices are being charged — to power outlets and my Amex. I don't use social media as much as I probably should; if FB could be im-

planted in my brain and I could friend you just by thinking of you, I'd consider it if Medicare would pay for it when I've passed from .edu to .gonefishing. For this last piece I genuinely regret not saving all my cell phones from 1994 for a teachable moment performance art piece that would chronicle my life with cell phones, from big to small, dumb to smart. It would be a cautionary tale of life with technology, a tale told of sound and fury...



Your Links:

<http://tinyurl.com/q25pcsm>

ZDNET review looks beyond defeat to what's ahead...

<http://tinyurl.com/npl4fk>

Mobilemedia welcomes QWERTY back to the phone. Show your kids if they haven't found an app to easy key their texts...

Annals of Search: Search by Wire

We high enough for landing? — Questions you want your pilots to know...

"five years ago we passed the point where automation was there to back up pilots...clearly today the pilot is there to backup the automation...what you die from is not understanding what configuration will keep the aircraft in the air..." — Bill Voss, Flight Safety Foundation

My Pilates instructor, a bright divorced mother of three kids, put it simply. We were talking about research on the Web and she commented that no matter how she searched she felt lead by someone other than herself. I explained that her own search history was working against her. Google prides itself on tracking your click history and giving you what they believe you want.

We agreed — a new invisible hand was at work and it wasn't free market. And in some ways, the practice was dishonest.

Perhaps honesty is too severe a demand to place on a search engine. It is, after all, not human. Still it is making human-like decisions, or how does that driverless car amble around the sunshine state?

I'll admit I use Wikipedia as much as any other Google user. Good or bad, it has consolidated knowledge posted on the Web into a convenient, if bland and tone-deaf description, of stuff you want to know. Google now even grabs a little of the ready-reference content and formats it in its organic search results. It's eye-catching, this suggestively visual estimate of Wikipedia knowledge.

It's so, well, driverless. What it is, is search by wire. You're inputting data, usually simple words that you understand stand in for the answer or information you seek. The wheels for your words spin or more accurately they've already been spun billions of times by others. Out spills results Google wants for you especially information that sells you something.

Our understanding of what our users want is informed by some surveys by our pollsters like **OCLC**, **Summon**, **Ithaka Group**, or that odd barometer, **Libqual**. We read the younger our users are, the more they just want to "google it." Hey, google is the most active verb in library research!

Any good reporter or investigator follows the money. Our analogue: follow the wire. When a student opens Google to "research," the invisible hand takes over. Just a few words will do it because the wheels will turn and the click records tally the score and, like magic, the student will get what millions of other students over the years have gotten. Mostly a supply of term paper sites with links to papers posted by similar students for similar or even the same courses.

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Too many words, the student will get nothing. Exactly why is anybody's guess. A few of us attended a Google education class conducted by young Googlers at **Colorado State** last January. They urged us not to use sentences, as Google, contrary to popular belief, didn't work well with natural language searches.

We were also told to go easy on quotation marks, the favorite trick of the advanced librarian searcher. It seems Google works with tiered indexes; the more-often-searched terms and clicked results are searched first. Using quotation marks forces the search engine to dig deep into that part of the black box that is seldom helpful for popular results. You've entered Google's junk drawer.

Search by wire, just like fly-by-wire, works when it works. Decision making becomes cloudy when you can't show sky and horizon.

Your Links:

<http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2013/05/nsa-manual-on-hack-ing-internet/>

Wired article on NSA's in-house Google search tips manual. There is a link to the pdf and Amazon sells it at the Kindle store.

<http://guides.library.colostate-pueblo.edu/googlesearch>

Webinar recordings from the **Colorado State University** Google Seminars on search and all things Google...

<http://www.amazon.com/Fly-Wire-William-Langewiesche/dp/B0055X5XZO>

Amazon link to **William Langewiesche's** book on how commercial aviation gets you from place to place usually safely but with huge missteps of errors in the human machine agreement...

Back Talk
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Now at **New York University's Shanghai Campus**, about 99.9% of the materials immediately accessible by our students and teachers are digital. Certainly the first trend, new technologies expand and limit who has access to information is correct in our case. Our students can enjoy the opportunity to access nearly a million volumes of eBooks, tens and tens of thousands of academic journal titles, have excerpts of millions of other books scanned for them from NYC, and can electronically place requests for other books to be delivered from the home campus using a courier service. Because of this, we are cognizant of our need to make

Handicapping the Hyde Park OA Derby

The Lineup:

Rick (Humble Pie Not) Anderson

Jean Claude Guedon University of Montreal (Boom Boom G)

The Low Country Palmetto Classic will be a two-horse race on the carpeted track at Frances Marion Downs. All other entries have scratched from utter exhaustion of the topic. Pre-race betting places the entries even. **Rick (Humble Pie Not) Anderson** has trained substantially for the race, working the winter season in all the venues — Lib-License, Scholarly Kitchen, and the monthly conferences of an interim Dean. **Guedon (Boom Boom G)** has kept pace with slow, persistent ripostes on Lib-License to any diss on green open access.

Sources beyond approach report that **Guedon** will bust out first from the gate singing a verse or two from **Tom Waits' All the World is Green**:

*"maybe when our story's over
we'll go somewhere where's it's always spring
the band is playing our song again
and all the world is green."*

Applause and laughs will erupt at the first turn as the simultaneous French translation by **Stevan Harnad** via Skype kicks in. Nonplussed, and sipping a noncaffinated drink, **Humble Pie Not** nudges the backstretch rail with a solid imitation of a young Hegel fully attuned to the objective world. **Anderson** gait signals the fans how it is in his humble opinion. **Humble Pie Not** will edge the lead only to fall back as his second sentence channels the older Hegel (B2849.I3 H46 2003) laying down the theory of theories that encourages no objections — keine Einwände.

Boom Boom G Guedon, no slouch, and taking in loving stride the rhythmic slap of **Harnad's** omnipresent green whip, will attack the crowd with even nastier tales of bad STM behavior including **Elsevier**, the fat Dutchman, secret funding of the Finch report. Over Skype the crowd will hear, loudly, **Harnad's** cursing the Finchnados and demanding an open access market riot..."aux armes bibliotecaires!"

As they enter the stretch, the crowd, stunned into confused silence, wondering if they've covered their bets in this race that will take a century to finish. The contestants are frothing at the mouth, their hearts taking a pounding from their Lasik-laced arguments. It will be a stunning photo finish, won by a nose. 🐾

sure our students are trained to take full advantage of all these information riches. I am still not so sure about the second trend about online education bringing about an end to traditional forms of education. In China, at least, there is an enormous amount of online education (my 2001 dissertation focused on the library and information needs of the hundreds of thousands of **Television University** students in China), but they clearly want flesh-and-blood teachers and are willing to pay premium fees to get them.

With all the news about **Edward Snowden** and NSA snooping into databases, and the amount of time and effort spent in some countries of the world to control access to information, I don't think I need to say much about the boundaries of privacy and data protection, the

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